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Editorial of the Socialist issue 977

Sustained mass movement needed to stop Tories wrecking our NHS

Ambulances [queued up](#) outside A&Es. Trolleys carrying people in need of care stacked end-to-end in corridors. Long-awaited operations cancelled. Sick people [lying on cold, hard floors](#) because no beds are available.

The winter NHS crisis has provoked fury from patients and health workers alike, with many taking to social media to share candid photos of the situation. The Tory government cries crocodile tears but is, of course, unwilling to take the necessary action. We have to fight for our health service - starting with the important protests and demonstration planned for 3 February.

"Nothing's perfect," Theresa May told the BBC's Andrew Marr on 7 January. This was in response to a report that a woman who had suffered a stroke was left waiting in an ambulance for four hours before being seen. Whenever Marr raised the question of funding, May refused to contemplate the idea that money was the issue, repeating things like "you also need to look at how the NHS works, how it operates".

This is the very same language that the Tories use to justify their £20 billion of cuts (or "efficiency savings"). They want us to believe that the delays and overcrowding are not because of lack of resources but in fact because of 'waste' - best solved by further funding reductions and by handing yet more services to the private sector to leech profit out of.

It is in the very DNA of the Tory party to attack the NHS. It is the oldest capitalist party in Europe and by its nature fights to represent the interests of the capitalist class. Of course the bosses and their political representatives have to take into account the fierce attachment to the NHS that exists among the working class in Britain and the risk of provoking a huge movement if they go too far.

But a publicly owned and funded NHS, free at the point of use is not in the best interests of the super-rich. They want ongoing tax cuts for themselves and their corporations - money that could otherwise be used to fund the NHS and other public services. And they greedily eye the service for the potential profit that could be made from a more US-style system. The Tories dutifully cut, privatise and run down the NHS in an attempt to prepare the way for further moves in that direction.

Workers know this. A January poll by YouGov showed Jeremy Corbyn's Labour 18 points ahead of the Tories on which party would best handle the NHS, the highest lead of any of the issues asked about. Polls also consistently show that the vast majority of people want to maintain the NHS as a public service, and think people should fight to defend it.

Tories out

So the Tories' poor standing and blatant mismanagement of the NHS have the potential to bring the government down. But only if we build a strong, united, movement against them and their plans for our health service. In this context, the emergency actions called on 3 February by Health Campaigns Together (HCT) - with a major demonstration in London coinciding with local protests elsewhere - have the potential to attract huge support.

The HCT [demonstration in March 2017 attracted 250,000 people](#). Since then the anger has only grown and the success for Corbyn's general election manifesto, including defence of the NHS, highlighted the popularity of anti-austerity ideas. Trade unions, health and anti-austerity activists and the Corbyn supporters inside Labour should build for these events seriously over the next few weeks. Rather than being the end of the story for another year, 3 February should be a springboard for a sustained mass campaign.

The trade unions, particularly the health unions, have a vital role to play. Health workers are suffering horrendous working conditions, long hours and stress trying to deal with the current crisis 'at the coal face'. And what do they get in return? A vague promise of an above-1% pay rise for the first time in six years - in exchange for considering changes to antisocial hours payments and pay increments.

The junior doctors, and then the ancillary workers [at Barts Trust hospitals](#) in east London, have shown the way with their determined strikes. If given a lead, and as part of a serious campaign to win a decent pay rise and to defend the service, workers across the sector would respond to a call for strike action. This should be coordinated across the different health unions. Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and their supporters in the Labour Party should clearly come out in favour of such action and of the 3 February protests. Placing Corbyn's Labour at the head of a mass movement to defend our health service would be a key part of winning the mass working class support necessary to kick out the Tories and bring in a Corbyn-led government.

Building this type of movement can be the start of winning a socialist NHS - one that is fully publicly owned and funded to meet people's needs, and democratically run by health workers and service users.

Emergency demonstration - NHS in crisis: fix it now!

- 12pm Saturday 3 February
- Gower Street , London WC1E

Movement of workers and youth challenges Iranian regime

P. Daryaban, Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

Sudden large scale nationwide protests have shaken Iran. Sections of the population have shown utter defiance of the regime. Young people in particular, facing unemployment estimated at between 25% and 40%, have been to the fore.

The protests, initially against the price rises and corruption, almost immediately developed into clashes with security forces, with a mounting death toll.

In some cities, people attacked police stations, pro-regime paramilitary headquarters and religious seminaries.

The immediate spark was opposition to December's announcement of more neoliberal policies by the 'moderate' president, Hassan Rouhani, as well as a sharp rise in staple goods' prices alongside the publication of details of the increased lavish financing of religious bodies.

With continuing mass unemployment and an average 15% drop in living standards over recent years, the protests spread rapidly across the country.

The economic crisis has deepened over the last few years. This is seen in the huge debts of the government to banks, the depletion of resources of pension funds, the bankruptcy of financial institutions and an unbelievable amount of corruption and embezzlement, which has directly damaged working class living conditions. This, along with the growing visibility of a wealthy elite, was another key factor in these protests, which heard calls of "down with the embezzlers!"

The Rouhani administration boasted about reducing inflation to single digits and increasing the growth rate to 6%. However, the first was partially achieved by neoliberal measures, while the second was just the product of the regime's ability to export oil after a part of UN-imposed sanctions were lifted.

The regime has also depleted its resources by involving itself in wars in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Additionally the Lebanese Hezbollah leader openly announced that they receive all the money for their party and for improving infrastructure in South Lebanon from Iran. The regime pays huge funds to the military forces it backs in Iraq too.

The regime, for a while, sought justification through fearmongering about the emergence of terrorism inside Iranian borders etc. However, with the fall of Isis, the regime's bogeyman has largely disappeared, at least for now.

US president Donald Trump's coming into office aggravated the situation and shattered the Iranian regime's dreams of attracting foreign investments. Iranian banks have not been able to return to the international banking system.

During the last three or four years, two major movements kept the flame of opposition alight - the workers' movement and the campaign by depositors in bankrupt financial institutions.

Major strikes and pickets took place in Arak in north-western Iran and in the oil and gas rich areas of the south, along with continuing protests at the repression of trade union activists like a leader of the Tehran bus workers and others from the Haft-Tapeh Sugar Company in Khuzestan.

Significantly the independent trade unions in these workplaces issued, along with some others, a statement supporting the protests.

The financial institutions, which were mostly founded by people affiliated to the regime, have robbed millions of dollars from depositors, ranging from low-income people who deposited tiny amounts to live on, to rich people who received huge interest payments.

The story of these institutions, as well as colossal embezzlement of the teachers' pension fund, and social security organisation, is not about simple capitalist profiteering. It is like a Middle Ages story of plunder. None of the corrupt officials have been punished.

What added fuel to the fire was December's announcement of Rouhani's 2018 budget bill that proposed an increase in prices of petrol and gas oil of around 40%. At the same time egg prices suddenly rose in recent weeks.

This means that the poor cannot afford even very basic food. The budget also proposed ending the 455,000 rial (US\$12.60) monthly payments under the Cash Subsidy Programme to around 34 million people, about 40% of the existing recipients.

Furthermore the budget bill's publication of the huge, increased allocation of funds to parasitic religious institutions enraged people. While this budget plan spoke of increasing state expenditure by 6%, with inflation officially running at nearly 10%, it really continued the neoliberal cuts policies which Rouhani introduced after taking office in 2013 (official figures typically downplay inflation and unemployment rates).

The growth of social media has completely overshadowed state-run news outlets, allowing people to share more freely their anger and dissatisfaction.

The people, with no independent class struggle trade unions allowed in Iran, used any gap and space possible to raise their demands. The deepened crisis and anger has widened the divisions and infighting inside the regime.

Ex-president Ahmadinejad began to bitterly attack the judiciary and the executive. Khamenei warned Ahmadinejad in an attempt to silence him but the so-called Supreme Leader has lost authority even inside the regime.

Under these circumstances, the 28 December protests in Mashhad were a spark. First, the focus was on rising prices and corruption but quickly became more broadly political. The crowd shouted "death to the dictator" and called for freedom for political prisoners.

Lost control

Even if there was fear that the so-called regime hardliners incited the protests to use it as a lever of pressure on Rouhani, it is clear that they lost control of the protests almost as soon as they began!

The following day, similar demonstrations happened in Tehran, Rasht, Kermanshah, and Ahvaz with slogans that targeted the top leaders of the regime.

The character of this movement is that it is mostly spontaneous without a unified leadership, and is largely based on the masses' initiative on the ground. Remote towns and cities are not waiting for large cities. They have engaged in the movement completely independently.

The regime was briefly paralysed and hesitated to launch a very violent counter-offensive, though it has now arrested thousands and killed at least 21 so far.

Wherever it has tried to use what it calls its "iron hand" the people punished it severely. In Malayer and Shahinshahr, people reportedly occupied police stations and the highest local cleric's office. This is not only happening in Fars (Persian) areas, but Kurds and Baluchis have also joined the protests.

This movement is totally based on the masses' initiative. Many have completely broken with the reformist leaders of the 2009 Green movement, who just used the people in the elections and in dividing up power with the other main faction in the ruling elite.

The so-called reformist faction even openly condemned the current protests and called for their suppression. This movement showed the widespread disappointment with President Rouhani, who was overwhelmingly re-elected in May with over 57% of the vote,

The bulk of the movement has shifted from a big layer of the middle class, who predominately made up the 2009 Green protests, to the working class, the unemployed and poorer middle classes. The accumulated anger has extremely radicalised the movement. The masses no longer believe in Gandhi-type 'non-violent' and 'silent' demonstrations. They openly call for overthrowing the regime.

Women, as before, have played a remarkable role in the movement, sometimes engaging more daringly than men. This is because of the double oppression they have suffered under the harsh right-wing Islamist rules.

At the time of writing, the Iranian regime's suffocating censorship of the Internet limits the amount of accurate, up to date information of what is happening around the country.

We are not sure how long these spontaneous protests will continue but what is certain is that they have opened a new chapter in Iranian post-1979 revolutionary history. This new stage marks the start of a full break from the regime and its factions by significant layers. Rule by the clergy is increasingly seen as being responsible for what is happening.

However, despite its high level of militancy, this movement suffers from serious weaknesses. It is still in its very early stages and, with the absence of a revolutionary party able to propose a clear strategy, it faces the risk of losing momentum despite its rapid rise.

Inevitably, this weakness produces mixed and contradictory trends in the consciousness of the participants. Thus sometimes even slogans in support of the pre-1979 monarchy can be heard, though this was not the dominant mood.

The initial sphere of action of this movement was on the streets, and it has not yet fused with workplace protests. Only being in the open spaces and streets does not ensure the movement's survival. It needs to shape itself around factories, workplaces, communities and educational institutions.

If the working class in the main industries - oil, gas, petrochemical and automobile - engages in even a 24-hour strike it would put its seal on the movement and give it a huge drive forward.

Learn lessons

Iran's left must try to learn from the lessons of [the 1979 revolution](#), [the 2009 protests](#) and the experience of revolutionary struggles in the world, especially in [the 'Arab Spring' of 2011](#). This also requires a greater sense of internationalism and cooperation with the forces of the international socialist movement.

The left must react to these new opportunities with proposals for activity, organisational forms and practical methods to strengthen and improve this movement.

While the current protests may wind down, they have fundamentally changed the situation in Iran. This experience can lay the basis for the building of a workers' movement that can challenge both the regime and capitalism.

The first steps must be the bringing together of activists in groups and committees to coordinate activities and work out demands and a political programme. The left must start a dialogue to form a united front, as a step towards founding a democratically run mass working class party that can bring together workers, the poor and youth in fighting for an alternative.

Marxists argue for a programme that links demands for democratic rights, against repression, to defend and improve living standards, with the need for a government of genuine representatives of workers and the poor.

A workers' government could begin the socialist transformation of Iran by nationalising, under democratic control, the commanding heights of the economy. This would have enormous appeal to working people across the Middle East and beyond.

The left must warn of imperialist-backed intervention to subvert and divert the movement. Trump's hypocrisy must be exposed. While professing "support" for the Iranian people he embraces the Saudi dictatorship.

At the same time any illusions that pro-Western capitalist alternatives may bring a better life for the people need to be combated with a socialist programme that explains what could be achieved if capitalism is overthrown.

Only a society ruled by representatives of the workers and toilers can resolve the chronic crises in Iran, win democratic rights, and put an end to poverty and oppression based on gender, religion and ethnicity. A workers' revolution in Iran would stimulate progressive, democratic and socialist forces in the Middle East and cut across reactionary Islamist ideas and forces.

- See also ['Iran: Protests against financial scandals helped spark wider opposition'](#) on socialistworld.net

Iranian socialists speak out

The Socialist spoke to two Iranian socialists now living in the UK, Maryam and Aref (not their real names). Maryam was in Iran last summer; Aref participated in the Green Revolution in 2009 but has been living in the UK for several years.

Maryam

There have always been people selling cheap goods like pens or socks in the walkways of the Tehran metro but last summer I was amazed at the numbers of young people, including clearly well-educated people, reduced to selling stuff.

They were being harassed by security staff who threatened to arrest them. I spoke to one man who had been a factory worker but lost his job, now selling pens.

There is nothing for young people in Iran. If they want to have fun, they face arrest - like the young people videoed on YouTube dancing to Pharrell Williams' 'Happy'; they were lashed and sent to prison in 2014.

Also, there are a huge number of abortions, all illegal, because young people can't afford to have a baby. And if they have one when they are not married they will face stigma and harassment from the state.

Air pollution in Tehran is dreadful. This is partly due to traffic congestion but also due to environmental mismanagement by the regime.

Some lakes have dried up and the soil has turned to dust which blows into the city. They have to close schools and children are suffering more and more from respiratory diseases.

People have no confidence in the state. There was an earthquake in Kermanshah last November, and blocks of flats which were supposed to be earthquake resistant collapsed due to faulty construction.

Two months later survivors are still living in tents in the middle of winter, and had to watch as army units, who could have helped with relief, passed by on the way to Syria.

Aref

I was in Tehran at the time of the Green Revolution in 2009, when there were protests, mostly in Tehran, about rigged election results. Today's movement is very different. It is much bigger and more widespread. If the Green Revolution was 4 on a scale of 0-10, this is an 8!

The one thing that both movements have in common is that there is no strong left leadership. We need to put this right, and demand the release of those recently arrested and all trade unionists and political prisoners.

The combination of people on the protests now is very different, with many working class people joining in.

All the factions of the regime have condemned the protests, including the so-called reformists. In 2009 I remember a mullah who was a murderer being carried shoulder-high by protesters because they believed he was a reformer! Not now. No one has any illusions any more, which explains the popular slogan 'no to conservatives, no to reformers! Down with the regime!'

The government's attempts to act as a regional power by intervening in Syria, Lebanon, etc, are very unpopular. Hezbollah in Lebanon is entirely funded by Iran, yet people in Iran are starving and unemployed.

Financial scandals mean people have given up hope, which they still had in 2009, of things getting better for them. The president's budget, with the withdrawal of subsidies, has made this even clearer to people - although the petrol price rises have been reduced in response to the protests.

Trump's attack on the regime only helps it. He's a hypocrite. A few years ago the US promised to put up a satellite which would mean the Iranian government couldn't ever switch off social media. Nothing came of it because the US administration doesn't want Iranians to be politically active!

Student activists arrested in crackdown

- Urgent protests needed - details on socialistworld.net

A large number of Iranian students have been arrested during the crackdown by the regime following the outbreak of nationwide protests. Most of the students were active in the students' unions or in social and political campaigns.

They were transferred to the notorious Evin prison in Tehran and some have gone on hunger strike. Reports say at least three incarcerated protesters have died.

In protest against the arrests, trade unions at 27 universities have written a letter to the science minister Mansour Gholami requesting the unconditional release of the arrested students.

Please send urgent protests to:

- Ministry of Science, Research and Technology: cisc@msrt.ir

- Leader of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei on twitter: @khamenei_ir (English) or @Khamenei_fa (Persian) or email: info_leader@leader.ir or contact@leader.ir
 - President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani via email: media@rouhani.ir or on twitter: @HassanRouhani (English) and @Rouhani_ir (Persian)
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Sweden

School strike against deportations

Liv Shange Moyo, Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna, (CWI Sweden)

Before the seasonal holidays began in Sweden, an historic strike against the deportation of refugees was organised. On 12 December, at 12noon, school students across the country - from Boden in the north to Ystad in the south - took part. At least 50 schools in 19 cities and towns were involved. The sense of strength and cohesion was overwhelming.

The strike's show of strength could be a launch pad for a sharpening of the ongoing struggle against the government's divide-and-rule and deportation policy.

Globala Gymnasiet in Stockholm - the secondary school (16-18-year-olds) at which the initiative for the strike began - was basically emptied of students (only those who were sitting national examinations in maths remained).

Assembled in the schoolyard, the Globala students started off with an hour of speeches before joining students from 20 schools at the Medborgarplatsen square. In total, 2,000 participated at Medborgarplatsen for one-and-a-half hours, despite foul weather.

Like Globala in Stockholm, Gymnasiebyn in Luleå served as an organising centre for the strike. The students in 'Let us Live - Young in Sweden', Luleå, had aimed at a 'real' school strike since September and started discussing it seriously in October. The fact that students in two cities worked together made a nationwide strike possible, and the two driving centres constantly spurred each other on.

Long weeks of preparation strengthened the commitment of the young activists who carried out the strike. Because of that, the spread of the initiative took on a life of its own, especially in the last days before 12 December when a number of new schools and locations joined in - such as Tranås, Östersund, Ystad, Gävle and Umeå. Having a worked-out 'kit' for strike organisation, such as flyers, mobilisation lists, to-do lists, was a great help.

Eventually, 4,000 took part in the strike - 2,000 in Stockholm, 500 in Gothenburg, 300 in Borås, 200 in Uppsala, and 150 each in Lund, Luleå, Boden and Piteå. 50 schools in 19 locations were affected, from north to south, east to west. These are impressive figures which sum up yet another historic step forward in the building of a fighting opposition to the Social Democratic and Green coalition government's brutal migration policy.

More important than the numbers, however, is the political weight of the strike. The fact that school students 'downed their tools' as a protest is a guide to the kind of methods that are germinating and waiting to be taken up as the struggle grows.

In 2015, more than 35,000 unaccompanied children came as refugees to Sweden. Not until this year did they begin to get news on decisions about asylum or (mostly) deportations.

Action by refugees

In early August, young Afghan refugees started what became a 58 day 24/7 out-door sit-down strike in Stockholm, spreading also to other cities. The sit-down strike called Ung i Sverige (Young in Sweden) started

with a handful. At the peak, they were about 1,000, gaining increased support and putting pressure on the politicians.

The mood against deportations has also been nurtured by the provocations of both the state and the Nazis - the victorious anti-Nazi mobilisation in Gothenburg on 30 September played a major role - both as inspiration and as a warning of the destructive forces fostered by state racism.

Following the disclosures of arbitrary age revaluations and growing numbers of rejections of asylum applications, the migration board's credibility has been laid bare, and this hardened the determination of the strike preparations.

Members of Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna (RS) and Students Against Racism played an important part in the strike preparations. Our weekly paper, *Offensiv*, carried reports and analysis and received a very good response from the activists. On the day of the strike, RS had speakers at the demos in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Borås, Luleå and Boden.

At the Stockholm demo, there were speeches from refugees, several organisations and individuals: Students Against Racism, School Students Against Deportations, Young in Sweden and others. Natalia Medina spoke for RS: "We've never got anything for free. Not a single right has come because the rulers suddenly realised that it was a good idea. Arguments and appeals to politicians and rulers do not work. It's big mass movements, strikes and protests that make change", she said to enthusiastic applause.

Solidarity messages were read out from striking students in Kassel, Germany, and Tamil refugees in Britain. At one meeting preparing the strike *Sindicato Estudiantes* (the students union) in Spain shared important lessons about school strikes via skype.

It is a strength that the strike, in addition to focusing on making the day's activities a success, also managed to look forward to continued struggle. The call for a protest day with strikes and demonstrations in January-February is a brilliant initiative that should be spread in all forums - trade unions, cultural, sport and tenants associations, for example.

Closer coordination between the various centres of action, as well as discussions on the alternative to the government's deportation policy, is a key to further steps forward.

The state and establishment are clearly concerned. Two weeks before the strike, the government announced a partial retreat which they claimed could give asylum to up to 8,000 refugees.

However, it is subject to a string of conditions. Only those who arrived before 25 November 2015 are included. The young refugees must qualify for, and pass through secondary education and, after that, find a job. And this is to be implemented "by summer".

Meanwhile rejections and deportation orders continue. The Monday before the school strike a group of refugee youth were deported. A number of young refugees have committed suicide this year.

Retreats fail

The government hoped that the announced retreat would calm the movement; instead, it is arriving at increasingly radical conclusions and applying increasingly radical methods.

The government attempts to slow down the movement against the expulsions are driven by fear. Young people at the head of a fast-paced and fast-moving movement threaten to pull more and more people into the fight against the Social Democrats' and Green's brutal refugee policy.

The struggle of recent months has already opened many eyes to the naked hypocrisy of the Swedish government's policies. It has exposed that the real "us" and "them" are youth and workers of all origins against the tiny elite which tries to use suspicion against people on the run to divert focus from the fundamental deep social problems in society.

The school strike represents an escalation that gives great hope of many more people being reawakened in the coming months - not only for the struggle for another refugee policy but also for a socialist society.

Refugee Rights campaign

In the face of Tory racism and austerity a number of Tamil asylum seekers initiated [the Refugee Rights Campaign in the UK](#), backed by Tamil Solidarity and the Socialist Party. Refugee Rights was one of the biggest and liveliest contingents on the March Against Racism in London last year.

Refugee Rights points out that an unprecedented 65.6 million people around the world have been uprooted from their homes by war and environmental catastrophes. Among them are nearly 22.5 million refugees, over half under the age of 18.

Those refugees who reach Britain usually find themselves in dire circumstances. It often takes many years for asylum seekers to be accepted by the bureaucratic system as refugees.

In the meantime they are denied the right to work and are forced to live on a bare minimum of £5 a day to pay for their basics such as clothing, food, drinks, transport. Most asylum seekers are living in poverty and experience poor health and hunger.

Many are also subject to detention. The UK is the only country in Europe that does not have a limit on the length of time that someone can be detained.

Refugee Rights demands that asylum seekers must not be treated as criminals or held in detention centres. Their fundamental human rights need to be defended.

It supports the demand to allow the right to work for all asylum seekers/refugees.

It has launched an appeal to trade unions to affiliate to the Refugee Rights Campaign, including giving financial support.

- For model union resolution and more info see refugeerightscampaign.org
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Cabinet chaos as shambolic reshuffle underlines Theresa May's impotence

Roger Bannister, Socialist Party national committee

There was more excitement in the media in advance of Theresa May's cabinet reshuffle than among working class people. And in the event, the reaction of workers turned out to be more realistic.

Rather than producing a new team with a new mission more reflective of the country at large, as Tory apologists were predicting, the message of this reshuffle is "more of the same, only worse!"

Most key players in the existing cabinet remain in place. In particular Boris Johnson, who with his record of diplomatic gaffes is arguably the least suitable foreign secretary ever, remains in post.

Similarly, Philip Hammond, whose first budget ended in a humiliating u-turn for the Tories over National Insurance rates, keeps his hands on the national finances.

Other ministers to stay in are Brexit secretary David Davies, home secretary Amber Rudd and Greg Clark, business secretary.

Two senior ministers remain in post but with additional responsibilities. Sajid Javid has had housing added to his communities and local government brief. And Jeremy Hunt is to add social care to his health secretary position.

It could be assumed from these moves that, having inflicted massive cuts to local government and the health service respectively, these two are being rewarded with new areas to attack. But the situation is more complicated than that.

May wanted to move Hunt to the business secretary position, but he refused to go - correctly gambling that May is too weak to sack him outright!

Disastrous election

This reshuffle is more to do with attempting to boost the Tory party's image after May's disastrous [general election last year](#). But, as indicated by Hunt's brinkmanship, there are clear signs that behind the scenes May has had problems enforcing her will on recalcitrant ministers.

Early in the day the Tory party tweeted congratulations to Chris Grayling for being made chairman of the party. It was later announced that Brandon Lewis had been given the job instead!

And education secretary Justine Greening resigned rather than be moved to the Department for Work and Pensions, replaced by Damian Hinds.

May's task is actually an impossible one.

She has installed a fellow Remainer, David Lidington, as de facto deputy prime minister after her last Remainer deputy Damian Green left under a cloud. But she is still struggling to assert authority over a party with irreconcilable splits over Brexit.

No amount of reshuffling can resolve that. Nor can it restore the dwindling fortunes of the Tories, clinging onto power only with the support of the reactionary Democratic Unionist Party.

Her government is fundamentally weak. The continuation of the policies of austerity is causing misery for millions of working class people.

Meanwhile Corbyn-led Labour, despite the sabotage of Blairite MPs and councillors, offers an alternative, with some hope for improvement of the lives of suffering workers.

The trade unions should organise the killer blow for this decrepit Tory government. Mass, union-led demonstrations, coupled with coordinated strike action, could see the Tories off, rather than allowing them to stagger on in power.

Bigot Toby Young quits - now scrap the new uni regulator driving privatisation

Theo Sharieff, national chair, Socialist Students

Bigoted Tory journalist Toby Young [has resigned](#) from the board of the government's new universities regulator, the Office for Students (OfS).

This follows public pressure in the form of widespread condemnation by students, education workers and trade unions for the litany of outright sexist, homophobic and anti-working class remarks he has publicly made in the past.

As if that weren't enough, Young has repeatedly come out against the culture of "inclusivity" in the state education system. He once even [described working class students as "stains."](#) Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and former frontbench Tory MP Priti Patel were quick to defend him.

But the body the government appointed him to remains unchanged. In fact, Young, an outspoken supporter of the Tories' education counter-reforms, was well-suited to the position. The OfS is part of the Tory government's rabid drive to marketise education.

Young is a pioneer of the 'free school' movement, part of the drive to force schools from the democratic control of local councils into the arms of unaccountable businesses and entrepreneurs.

The ruling board of the OfS is stuffed with business executives - including the chief executive of multinational law firm DLA Piper, and the managing director of tax-dodging chemist Boots. It is chaired by a former policy adviser to Tony Blair, Sir Michael Barber.

Not a single position on the 15-strong board has been left vacant for a trade union representative or a representative from the National Union of Students.

Universities minister Jo Johnson, Boris's brother, says that HEFCE, the main predecessor of the OfS in England, existed to "ensure the sector was suitably funded." The OfS, on the other hand, will be "driving value for money."

How? The Department for Education says the OfS will "encourage innovative providers to enter the market and meet demand."

The real objective of the OfS amounts to nothing more than forcing the barefaced privatisation of our universities. It's the same transformation which for years Young has striven for in secondary education.

Socialist Students welcomes Toby Young's resignation. But we demand the whole OfS be axed. We fight for a truly democratic and accountable system of free, fully funded education, run by and in the interests of students, staff and the trade unions.

Teacher recruitment falls by a third - cut workload, not funding

'Tom Donnelly', National Education Union rep, Yorkshire

Teachers throughout the country reacted with shock to the news that the number applying to train as teachers has [dropped by 33%](#), according to Ucas figures. This is the fifth year the government has failed to meet its recruitment targets, and the largest drop for many years.

Pausing to look up, bleary eyed, from piles of marking, planning and data analysis, we scratched our heads.

Why wouldn't a graduate want to train, adding thousands more to their student debt, to go into a profession where they are denigrated by management, worked into the ground for a low graduate wage, then bullied out of the job when they become too expensive?

Of course, teachers know all too well why people don't want to enter the profession: the managerialist culture that makes our schools into factories - cookie cutting students and staff before discarding the ones that don't fit the mould.

Our schools are increasingly joyless places where teachers are constantly scrutinised and found wanting. This scrutiny is increasingly oppressive and corrosive.

I heard over the holidays that management in an academy in the area I work had taken to calling observations "smash-ins" rather than drop-ins. Nice.

Add to this the fact that teacher salaries in England were worth [12% less](#) in 2015 than in 2005, according to the OECD. There have only been desultory 'pay rises' since. Is it any wonder graduates are looking elsewhere?

Many of the teachers who remain experience poor mental health due to micromanagement and the accompanying workload. As a rep for the National Education Union (NEU) I deal with the acute consequences of this every day: teachers burnt out and drained by the exam factories they work in.

Let's not forget who these teachers work with. In this pressurised, toxic environment it's no wonder our children are experiencing stress and anxiety at unprecedented levels.

Teachers need a new national contract. This must seriously reduce workload, guaranteeing a maximum working week and an end to unnecessary admin. It must scrap performance-related pay and raise pay above inflation to start making up for years of real-terms cuts.

With a membership approaching half a million, the newly merged NEU is in a powerful position to fight for this. In light of the latest anti-union laws, the leadership needs to prepare a serious campaign explaining the issues to build confidence for a ballot on national strike action.

Theresa May's reshuffle replacing Justine Greening with Damian Hinds as education secretary will change nothing. But coordinating strikes with other workers moving towards potential strikes, like nurses and civil servants, could bring this weak Tory government down.

Them & Us

How many billions of pounds did your asset portfolio appreciate by in the last year? Is it zero?

We knew it. You idiot! Instead of frittering your wages away on beans and rent you should be pumping it into financial speculation.

Here's what you could have won, compared to what you actually did...

You should have bought a bank. The Tories gave £4.4 billion to banks in tax breaks last year, according to Labour analysis. Banktastic!

Instead you bought a smaller chocolate orange. Last year Terry's shrank 10%, from 175g to 157g - for the same price. It's called 'shrinkflation', but it's more about shrinking your wallet than your waistline.

You should have worked less. The heads of top FTSE 100 firms earn 160 times the average wage of £28,200, according to last year's High Pay Centre analysis of 2016. At that rate you could afford to go home before you get out of bed!

Instead you worked too much. One in ten workers are officially "overemployed," working more hours than they want to, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Overwork is certainly more rife than that shows. Meanwhile a lot of us want more hours - or at least more secure hours.

You should have played the stock market. Last year the world's finance casinos gained \$9 trillion in (fictitious) value, according to analysts at MSCI. Spiv-a-licious!

Instead you played the jobs market. On top of endemic overwork and underemployment, both employment and job vacancies have started to fall. Unemployment also fell - because the long-term jobless are giving up looking, as shown in ONS figures for the third quarter of 2017.

You should have been an oligarch. The world's richest 500 billionaires boosted their wealth by \$1 trillion last year, according to Thomas Piketty's World Inequality Report. (See also letters, page 12.) Capital!

Instead you were a worker. Britain's 800,000 agency staff - that's four times the size of the army - are underpaid by £400 million a year, says the Resolution Foundation. And 4.6 million people in the UK are in "persistent poverty," according to the latest ONS figures for 2015.

McDonald's strike wins biggest pay rise in ten years

A McDonald's worker

McDonald's workers employed at company-owned restaurants will be receiving their biggest increase in pay in ten years on 22 January.

Workers organised in the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) took historic strike action at stores in Crayford and Cambridge on 4 September last year over pay, conditions and bullying. As a result they have now won a significant pay rise for themselves and all McDonald's workers in the UK.

BFAWU general secretary Ronnie Draper hailed the increase in pay and said: "When people say that strikes achieve nothing, they should look at the changes taking place within McDonalds. These brave workers have taken on the second largest employer in the world, and are winning."

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn also congratulated the workers and BFAWU on their victory by tweeting: "Congratulations to McDonald's workers and BFAWU for winning pay rises but the fight for £10 an hour is not over".

Exploitation

Indeed. Exploitative youth rates paid to those between the ages of 16-25 are set to continue - they will still not be paid the £10 an hour that their over-25 workmates will receive. As well as this, franchise-owned branches, which make up 65% of those in the UK, will still continue to set their own rates of pay.

At my restaurant the franchise owner says workers will be paid in line with the company's announcement, but whether this will happen remains to be seen, especially given that in the past workers have sometimes been underpaid for work that they have done.

For this reason BFAWU will continue organising in restaurants up and down the country, including in my own, to ensure that all McDonald's workers win £10 an hour, trade union representation and fair treatment.

RMT rail members buoyed by coordinated action

Newcastle

"Keep up the good work!"; "Don't let the bastards keep you down!" were some of the comments of people passing the RMT's picket line at Newcastle Central station.

RMT members across five train companies are striking against the introduction of Driver Only Operations (DOO). Guards deal with emergencies such as derailments, evacuations, fires, and driver incapacity. They are also invaluable to give help to passengers with disabilities and the elderly, ensuring the railways are accessible. They also provide a sense of security, especially for people travelling late at night.

At Newcastle one passenger told the BBC reporter that she was visually impaired and wouldn't go on a train without a guard.

Micky Thompson, RMT regional organiser, told the Socialist: "The mood amongst our members is good and the public are on board." He went on to say: "The [RMT] members are resolute and determined to win this dispute."

A poll of Northern Rail passengers found 75% of them would be concerned about their safety if the train no longer had a guard. However, greedy bosses are far more interested in profits than safety concerns.

The mood on the Newcastle picket line is that this is a strike that they can and must win!

Elaine Brunskill

Leeds

In temperatures of -2°C, RMT members were out in force at Leeds train station on the 14th day of strike action on Northern Rail, which was taking place as part of coordinated action across five train operating companies against the introduction of Driver Only/Controlled Operation (DOO/DCO).

Despite the chilly weather, the strikers were fired up and determined to win. Andy Budds, RMT executive member for Yorkshire & Lincolnshire told us: "The RMT membership is up across the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire region - this dispute has made us stronger as members can see our determination to keep guards guaranteed on every service in the region."

Other pickets told us they were equally determined to see this dispute through. The introduction of DOO/DCO would mean an uncertain future and the end of 'turn up and go' for many passengers with disabilities.

Even Tory transport minister Chris Grayling's latest 'offer' that current guards would still have a job in the next contract is not much - it could mean a zero-hour contract on minimum wage, as another picket told me.

RMT members will be out on Wednesday and Friday as well in their fight to defend the safety-critical role played by guards.

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Manchester

The strike took place on Northern Rail in coordination with other train operating companies after talks broke down again between the RMT and Arriva Rail North, because the company still refuses to seriously negotiate on the future of the guards.

There was a big and lively picket line at Manchester Victoria with a mood of determination as the strike escalated to three days this week. Some drivers who are members of the union Aslef refused to cross the picket lines in Manchester and Wigan, which gave a great boost to those striking.

Passengers stopped to give support including some who were complaining about Arriva Rail North management 'blaming every problem on the RMT'. After the increase in fares this month, as well as supporting the RMT's fight to keep the guard on the train, many passengers also support the demand for renationalisation of the railways.

Becci Heagney

Basingstoke and Farnham

Determined RMT pickets were out across South Western Railway buoyed by strong support from passengers angry at fare increases this year and wanting to see guards on the trains they use.

Stand on a picket line for five minutes and you'll find out more than you will listening to the news or reading the right wing press. Guards in Basingstoke were keen to share stories of the regular occasions they have had to respond to unwell passengers, those with disabilities needing help on and off trains and times when guards have had to step in to protect passengers from sexual assaults. As Wessex regional RMT organiser Mick Tosh said, "How's an automated train going to help deal with those cases?"

Far from being only door operators and ticket collectors, guards are every day ensuring the safety of passengers on the railways. Despite all this evidence, one guard asked: "Why does the government want 1,000 people travelling on a train with only one member of staff who can't help them? You don't get that on the airlines or at sea. We're solid here at Basingstoke in support of this action."

Like everything else it boils down to profits. One of the pickets at Farnham explained: "Get rid of the guards and these train operators won't cut fares, will they? There's more public money going into the railways and we have less staff on stations, especially at night. How's that safe for travellers?"

RMT members understand that their union is the obstacle facing rail franchise managers and the government who want to see profits soar at the expense of safety. A picket at Fratton in Portsmouth said: "I've worked in the non-unionised private sector and seen what that means, zero-hour contracts, low pay and no training. Get rid of the guards and undermine our union and it'll be no different here. Managers say renationalising means going back to the dark ages of the 70s but at least we could afford a holiday then!"

It's no wonder RMT members and passengers are increasingly enthusiastic about Jeremy Corbyn's call to renationalise rail and seeing the back of this profit hungry Tory government.

Nick Chaffey

Harrogate

Members of Harrogate Socialist Party visited the RMT picket line on their ongoing dispute over the issue of guards on trains with Northern Rail. All 11 RMT guards/conductors stationed at Harrogate were on strike. The picket was visited by the RMT assistant general secretary, Steve Hedley and the Leeds branch secretary, who came to show support and solidarity. The next strike is on Wednesday 10 January and the picket will be on from 7am to 10-30am. All support on the picket line is welcomed.

Paul Viney

These reports were first posted on the Socialist Party website on 8 January 2018 and were added to on 10 January. The Socialist carried a shorter version.

Amy Murphy for Usdaw president - vote for a fighting and democratic union

Socialist Party members in Usdaw

Elections for the new president of Usdaw, the shop and distribution workers' union, take place from 15 January with Socialist Party member Amy Murphy running to give the union a fighting leadership. That the union needs one is clear - the major supermarkets that Usdaw organises in have [attacked terms and conditions](#) and cut jobs in recent years, while the problems of zero-hour contracts and low pay are endemic in retail.

Amy previously ran for the position [in 2015 and received 45% of the vote](#) and goes into this election after 46 branches nominated her. She has been on the Usdaw executive council for six years and a rep in Tesco for 24 years.

Amy is fighting the election on a programme of campaigning for a £10 an hour minimum wage for all immediately, an end to the erosion of terms and conditions, an end to zero-hour contracts, supporting members when they want to take industrial action, and fighting to make Usdaw a democratic, member-led union. Amy is running as part of a Broad Left slate in the executive council elections which are also taking place.

Amy says: "As a shop worker, listening to members, I am aware of the unacceptable pressure being applied to staff of all grades to deliver, while still being expected to raise a smile! I strongly believe that the time has come to stand up to the companies you and I work for. Usdaw cannot carry on as it is, punching below its weight, while members live daily with the threat of cuts to pay and conditions."

- Ballot papers go out from 15 January. See ['Vote Amy Murphy for Usdaw President' on Facebook](#) for Amy's leaflet and updates on the campaign.

Newham academy strikes spread to Cumberland school

Ian Pattison, East London Socialist Party

"Why would we want more privatisation?!" This is how the National Education Union (NEU) rep at Cumberland school in Newham, East London, closed the picket line meeting to stop the school becoming an academy. An enormous number of striking teachers and teaching assistants greeted pupils. A group of students shouted "good luck, good luck" and "fight the good fight".

Speakers were crowding to say a few words. One of them gave full support for the strike from the NEU national executive. Martin Powell-Davies, NEU London regional secretary, reported from unhelpful talks between management and the trade unions and quashed myths that academies improve education. One striking teacher said that if they don't have breakfast before they start work, they can come out at the end of the day realising they haven't had anything to drink or eat at all, because the workload is so heavy.

But Cumberland staff should be very confident they can win. A spate of Newham schools [took strike action late last year](#). There's a growing mood in the borough that education must not be siphoned out of local control. A protest outside the next full council meeting was discussed. It's been reported that Labour councillors have voted in support of academies at local CLP meetings.

Newham is in the middle of the selecting councillors for the May 3rd council elections. If a new round of pro-academy Blairite councillors are selected, then campaigners may feel there is no choice but to stand against them in May to stop the tide of academies and austerity in Newham.

UCU members balloting for action on pension cuts

Sam Morecroft, Sheffield UCU anti-casualisation officer

The UCU (University and College Union) is balloting for industrial action across the "pre-92" universities in response to plans to entirely scrap guaranteed pension benefits for academic and academic-related workers enrolled in the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS).

The ballot will run until 19th January, with industrial action likely to begin in February.

These plans are so extreme that currently they would mean a lecturer beginning their career today would be as much as £208,000 worse off in retirement than someone retiring now.

Even before the full extent of these proposals were known, an indicative ballot of UCU members in the USS institutions showed 86% of staff were prepared to take action, on a turnout of 53% - more than enough to overcome the Tories' draconian anti-trade union laws.

Now that Universities UK (UUK) has announced that it wants to do away with guaranteed benefits altogether, the anger of university workers is approaching boiling point.

At my institution, the University of Sheffield, on Monday 11th December 150 members of staff attended a lunchtime meeting to express their anger and discuss the ballot.

We are certain in UCU that we will secure a resounding Yes vote for strike action - and we'll need it.

Not only has our pension fund been seriously undervalued, but under pressure from the Pensions Regulator (acting under the direction of the Tory government) USS now claims it is £7.5 billion in deficit.

In fact, a valuation commissioned by UCU shows the fund is £8 billion in surplus! Because USS is backed by the government, we are effectively fighting not just the employers but the Tories as well.

There is an opportunity to divide the employers however. At the University of Warwick, Vice Chancellor professor Stuart Croft has already broken rank with UUK and publicly criticised the proposals in a blog post.

It's no surprise that some VCs are worried - already the Teachers' Pension Scheme in operation in 'post-92' universities is more generous than what is left of USS.

Professor Croft and others are unsurprisingly worried that without a decent pension scheme, universities will struggle to attract staff to work for them.

As well as balloting for action, UCU is demanding that other VCs who criticise the changes privately speak out and say that these proposals will damage higher education.

Angela Rayner MP, the Labour Shadow Education secretary, has also spoken out against the changes, expressing her "deep concern" that hundreds of thousands of staff will be much worse off in retirement and calling for more negotiations.

That's good - just a couple of years ago statements of support from the Labour Party would have been unthinkable.

But UCU members need more. If we are forced to take strike action, the Labour Party should support our struggle and guarantee that any cuts to our pension will be reversed by it when in government.

UCU is rightly saying that it will take more than a few days of action to force the employers back on this issue.

Members need to prepare for an almighty battle and will need the support and solidarity of our students. Hands off our pensions - or we will shut down our universities!

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 3 January 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

2017 was the best fighting fund total this century!

Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer

In the last three months of 2017 Socialist Party members raised over £40,000 for the first time in the 21st century! Raising a fantastic £44,384 not only smashed the record for the most fighting fund raised in a quarter but also, with a magnificent total of £143,053, shattered the record set in 2016 of the most raised in a year.

The Socialist Party has no fat cat backers, who on Thursday 4 January had 'earned' in three days more than most workers earn in a year. We rely on the hard-earned money donated by ordinary workers who support our campaigns and ideas and the hard work and sacrifice of our own members.

61 branches hit their target in the last quarter. 23 branches raised over 200% and Liverpool branch once again raised the biggest sum of £2,674.

Socialist Party members campaigned tirelessly throughout 2017. There were very successful appeals at public meetings during the general election and after - £1,000 raised at the PCS civil servant's union conference, £2,000 at Unison, the local government and health union conference, and £1,500 at the London book launch of From Militant to the Socialist Party.

As well as public appeals and campaign stalls our members also raised funds in many other ways. Curry nights, car boots and cake sales; ping pong tournaments and plant sales; selling badges, mugs, Christmas cards and wall planners. All helped us achieve this record total.

Our task in 2018 is to make sure that this year is as successful as the last. This is vital as the fighting fund enables us to produce the leaflets, pamphlets, placards and posters that help raise the profile of the Socialist Party and the relevance of a socialist alternative.

You can help by raising funds for us or making a one-off or regular donation to the fighting fund.

Socialist sales highest in years as mistrust in capitalist media hits record levels

Ian Pattison, the Socialist campaigns organiser

More people bought the Socialist in 2017 than 2016, and 2016 beat 2015 too. Well done to all the sellers of the Socialist for achieving this.

The capitalist papers are experiencing record levels of mistrust while the Socialist is enjoying our best sales in years. Marketing firm Edelman's trust barometer found that just 24% of people trust the establishment media.

In 2017 the Socialist was there on the huge demonstrations in defence of the NHS and against Trump. In 2018 we'll do the same again and oppose Trump's UK visit.

In 2017 we backed community campaigns and joined picket lines. In 2018 we are one of the only publications to point out that Glenfield Children's Heart Centre - where baby Vanellope Hope Wilkins was born with her heart outside her body - was saved from closure by a mass campaign of local residents and workers in Leicester. Our article was a real celebration of the skills of the medical staff and workers at the hospital, backed by the local community.

In 2017 we provided a pull-out feature on the 1917 Russian revolution. 2018 is the fiftieth anniversary of the greatest general strike in history, France 1968, a revolution on our doorstep. You'll read a month of articles on this in the Socialist.

Help the Socialist's finances by taking out a direct debit subscription. If you already subscribe, ask a friend to do the same. You get the Socialist delivered every week and get to choose from a range of free books too.

Can you take a few extra copies of the Socialist to sell to people you know who you think might be interested? You don't have to be a member of the Socialist Party to sell the Socialist, contact us for a supply.

And please keep sending us articles about student campaigns, from picket lines, and what socialists are doing to build anti-cuts action in your area. This way the Socialist will continue to be a voice for working class people implacably opposed to austerity, and fighting for socialism.

Hoxton: "Stop this unwanted development"

Judy Beishon, Hackney Socialist Party

'We don't want luxury tower blocks built in Hoxton' was the verdict of every contributor in a public meeting called by the 'Save Britannia Leisure Centre' campaign in east London.

From the platform Hackney mayor Philip Glanville tried to defend his plan to replace the popular Britannia leisure centre with three tower blocks, a large academy school, and a new leisure centre on a patch of land presently classified as 'designated open space'.

His council cabinet argues that it would cost too much to renovate the present leisure centre and the only way a new centre can be funded is for 480 flats to be built on the site, 400 of them for private sale and only 80 classed as 'affordable'.

Nobody in the audience of over 50 people voiced any support for the proposals. Over 20 angrily slated different aspects of the scheme, including Socialist Party members who called for the council to stop doing the Tory government's bidding and instead to safeguard the site's use as a leisure facility.

There was a chorus of condemnation of the lack of 'transparency' of the cabinet - it asserts there's no alternative to its monstrous project while claiming it can't break 'confidentiality' with the organisations being lined up for involvement, so local people can't have the information they're requesting.

The mayor seems set on pushing on with the scheme regardless of the strong opposition, so the campaign will go on. "He must think he is Trump and the new leisure centre will be called the Phil Glanville leisure centre" was the verdict of a local resident after the meeting.

Virtually everyone took away Hackney Socialist Party's leaflet to read, and eight people bought a copy of the Socialist.

Closure of Nottingham unit shows dismantling of NHS

Chris Jackson, Nottingham Socialist Party

Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust is planning to shut down a unit for people suffering from serious alcohol and drug addiction issues. The closure of the 15-bed Woodlands Unit at Highbury Hospital in Bulwell is the latest cut to mental health services in Nottinghamshire, and may force patients to be sent to local A&E departments.

It comes as a direct result of using 'competitive procurement' (the market) to determine the future of services. No local NHS provider is able to provide a safe and viable service at the market average rate of £239 per

occupied bed day, and the trust is looking outside the NHS to find an organisation able to provide a service at this rate.

Vulnerable users

In October 2013, a report by the Centre for Health and the Public Interest stated that "the experience of the introduction of social care markets in England over the last two decades is that competition has driven costs down, reduced the quality of services, led to the casualisation and deprofessionalisation of the workforce, and left care users and their families vulnerable to a major provider collapse."

While this report refers to the care sector, there is evidence that these findings are being replicated across the NHS with the increasing use of market competition. Users of the Woodlands Unit are now at risk of similar failings.

The future of the unit was discussed by the trust at a secret meeting in August 2017. Framework, a local housing charity, has been in discussions with the trust about taking over the service, undercutting NHS providers. If this goes ahead, the service will be threatened with similar issues which have undermined services in the care sector:

Casualisation of the workforce - Framework is offering worse pay and conditions than the NHS and only one person out of the 20 existing staff is planning to stay on and work under these conditions. While not exactly casualisation, the effect will be that the valuable skills and experience of NHS trained staff will be lost. This will inevitably lead to:

Reduction in service quality - Woodlands was a centre of excellence when it opened. But a report by the Care Quality Commission has revealed that almost three quarters (72%) of private providers inspected were failing in at least one of the fundamental standards of care.

Vulnerability to provider collapse - if Woodlands were simply being left to close, there would be a public outcry, and the possibility of a campaign similar to that which helped keep the Glenfield heart unit in Leicester open. There are no guarantees that Framework will be able to maintain the service long-term.

As well as demonstrating the hollowness of the government's aim to provide 'parity' for mental health and other services, the prospect of Framework coming in to take over the service shows the role charities are being forced to play in dismantling the NHS. Framework, a homelessness charity, itself struggling to survive at a time of cuts to local services, has diversified from providing hostel accommodation to providing mental health support services, advice and guidance, and support into employment.

Charitable organisations which were set up to meet a certain need are being forced to follow the money and shift to meet other needs to fill the space left when statutory services are no longer funded. The government's justification for introducing the market is to increase quality and improve patient choice, but in fact the whole strategy is a step towards privatisation, whose real aim is to provide profits.

Photography: No Fear

Art can help expose sexual harassment

Mary Finch, East London Socialist Party

"No one stopped to help me when I walked through the barriers at Leeds train station and a drunk man grabbed and pulled my hair. No one helped me as he then proceeded to shout 'slag' and 'bitch' at me across the station when I managed to free myself."

Every woman has a story like this. Amy Cousens, a friend and fellow Socialist Party member, told me this one. I've been trying to capture those experiences - of the endemic, systematic sexual harassment and assault

of women - in a photography project titled No Fear.

Emilie Autumn, a musician poet, and author, writes in her book 'The Asylum for Wayward Victorian Girls' that in the US a woman is raped approximately every two minutes. A pedestrian is hit by a car in the US every eight minutes.

Theoretically, then, Emilie argues that a woman is safer walking in the middle of the road at night than on the pavement, because you're more likely to be harassed or assaulted than run over.

So I've been photographing women and non-binary people in the middle of the road at night to give expression to their anger, grief, fear and defiance. Everything that capitalist society ignores, and often actively tries to repress.

Not believed

Overwhelmingly, those who come forward with allegations of sexual harassment or assault are not believed - the result being that most don't come forward at all. But women are breaking the silence, and art has been an essential part of this process.

Jen Brockman displayed 18 outfits in an art installation at the University of Kansas, each a representation of what a survivor had been wearing when they were sexually assaulted. Lying among jeans and shirts, dresses, and pyjamas, is a child's red dress.

Noa Jansma, a 20-year-old student from the Netherlands, spent a month taking selfies with her street harassers and sharing them on Instagram.

One of the most disturbing things about the project is the reactions of the men. None of them refused a photo, which Jansma correctly concluded "shows that these men honestly do not realise they're wrong, they think it's the most normal thing in the world."

I started my project for two reasons. First, I believe that regardless of whether it is political or not, art is one of the most valuable products of humanity. I am a photographer because I want to capture and communicate the beauty and complexity of human consciousness.

Second, I am committed, absolutely, to fighting for women's liberation and for a socialist world. Women's oppression is inherent in capitalism, so full liberation means fighting for socialism.

Art has an important place in that process. But political art - projects like Jansma's, Brockman's, and my own - cannot create the change it seeks without looking outwards, towards workers and struggle.

The capitalists might own the system, but workers run it - and we have the power to overthrow it.

- No Fear is an ongoing project - to see the latest additions, or if you'd like to take part, visit [facebook.com/MarysPortraitsS](https://www.facebook.com/MarysPortraitsS)

Debate: should tower blocks form part of socialist housing policy?

Matt Kilsby and Paul Gerrard, Salford Socialist Party

In the wake of the [Grenfell Tower atrocity](#), Salford Socialist Party began discussing whether there is a role for tower blocks in a socialist housing policy. There were differing views so we organised a debate.

Matt Kilsby spoke first and in favour, arguing there are numerous great examples of well-built, well-planned high-rise living. Park Hill in Sheffield; Trellick and Balfron Towers and the Barbican and Golden Lane estates

in London; Byker in Newcastle; Alton West in London - to name just a few.

Socialist town planning would be about need, choice, abundance, democratic control and variety.

And to discount high-rise living on the assertion it is somehow 'unnatural' seems misguided. The subsequent problems with a large number of post-war high-rise buildings have not been because of their design, building materials, and so on - or that they are somehow 'unnatural' places to live - but the fact that they've been left to rot, with no money spent on upkeep.

Paul Gerrard, opposing new tower blocks, pointed out that Marx analysed the contradictions of capitalism, including the antagonism between cities and the countryside. Accumulation of capital drives a concentration of labour into big cities, and tower blocks are capitalism's answer.

There is no objective need to house people at such levels of density, with a lack of privacy and nowhere for children to play.

[Liverpool's Militant-led socialist Labour council](#) in the 1980s responded to high-rise residents' wishes by building two-storey, three-bed houses, as well as low-rise flats. We need to use derelict land, expropriate empty properties, and develop new towns and estates nearer the countryside.

Both speakers agreed that we oppose Sadiq Khan and other Blairites' attacks on older tower blocks, shedding crocodile tears over 'the mistakes of the past' to cover their own plans for privatisation and gentrification. In Salford, as in London and elsewhere, we demand and actively campaign for safe, high-quality council homes for all.

The Socialist Inbox

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in no more than 150 words to editors@socialistparty.org.uk - or if you're not online,

Socialist Inbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

Bailiff bother

We must renationalise the utilities now! As you can see (pic above right), NPower want to send in the bailiffs. For £32.

The fact I don't owe it as I'd already gone through the old switch-a-roo and joined SSE doesn't seem to bother them.

They'd put my bill up to £80 per month every month - how much I used doesn't seem to matter. If I was an old woman suffering from hypothermia, they'd have still no doubt sent me the letter. This, however, isn't my point.

My point is when we owned our electricity, you paid for what you used and had regular meter readings. This made good common sense - not just from an economical point of view, but an environmental one.

Then again, when did capitalism ever make sense?

Dave Wright, Birmingham

Gritting's snow joke

When you examine what measures were taken against the snow during December it is easy to see that most of them were in the interests of businesses and those most neglected are working class people.

The main emphasis on gritting and snow clearance is main roads leading into city centres to ensure that businesses can open and can carry out their profit-making activities.

Even major roads on suburban housing estates that lead to these main roads are less likely to be treated. This leads many residential areas to feel cut off.

Public transport can get really hammered. In Birmingham many buses weren't running as far as the outlying estates because the roads were too dangerous. The worst affected areas were large council estates built adjacent to exposed areas on the city's outskirts.

This meant that many workers had to take annual leave or just not get paid. In today's employment market some employers may see this as a sufficient excuse to fire people, knowing they can always replace workers quickly.

Many workers in large cities will need to get two buses to work, and there's no prizes for guessing that these will be low-paid workers who can't afford to run a car.

Cuts in gritting and snow-clearance budgets have clearly made this situation worse. Many more local grit or salt bins could be provided in these areas to limit the damage.

A Corbyn-led government should outlaw the practice of workers being forced to take holiday or go without pay when the weather prevents them from getting into work.

As usual austerity affects working class people much harder than better-off sections of the population. The only solution is a socialist society which would adequately fund vital public services and treat workers with respect.

Clive Walder, Birmingham

Billionaires' trillion

Hi to all comrades and socialists for the new year!

The situation of world capitalism and the bosses that run it was a bumper year for profits in 2017. We know that eight billionaires own more wealth than 50% of the earth's population. But it has now been reported that the 500 wealthiest individuals on the planet have increased their share for last year by \$1 trillion by speculation on the stock markets!

Meanwhile workers and poor farmers have seen living standards fall even further across the globe with wars, poverty, famine and unemployment epidemic in developing and neocolonial countries.

It doesn't stop there. The combined wealth of these 500 parasites now stands at \$5.3 trillion dollars! With an increase in their numbers of 145, to now stand at a staggering 1,542 dollar billionaires.

Talk about making your blood boil at such greed. But it is inherent in the laws of capitalism. This accumulation is inevitable in its decay, as the bosses are unable to develop the productive forces.

However, the voice of socialism is getting stronger and louder as workers look for a way out of this crazy blind alley that capitalism stands for.

Bill Murray, also Birmingham

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26680>